
Title: The Wraith - Vol. I

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“How does it look?”

Carefully, I gripped my companion by the shoulder and pulled him away from the slippery stone wall. He left behind stains of blood on the cobalt rock; strands, thick and black, sticking to where he once rested. In the flickering firelight, what little I could see was pure horror. Three deep gashes, each about three inches apart, were scored across his back from left waist to right shoulder. A mess of torn flesh, muscle and tendons, he had been ripped to the bone, right through his thick furs and leathers. In the freezing temperatures, the blood seemed to flow less willingly, but this made the injury no less grim. Slowly, I let him roll back to his resting place against the wall of the cave. The heat from the fire warmed the rock that encased us, forming droplets of water that either dripped from the jagged ceiling or slid their way down the curved wall. I wiped my hands on the moisture, trying to remove some of the blood that coated them.

“I’ve seen worse”.

“On a gutted pig?” He chuckled breathlessly, his

voice rattling.

“You just need rest.
The wound will heal
enough by morning.”

He gave another, hollow
laugh and smiled, a
crooked, disbelieving smile.

“You make it pay,
won’t you?”

“We will.” I insisted,
putting my hand on his
shoulder.

I looked the dying man in
the eye, hoping that some
of my confidence would
inspire him to keep on
fighting. He just gazed
back, his eyelids drooping.
I could tell he was tired.
So very, very tired. He
didn’t seem to have the
energy to fight, or to
even care that he was
facing his last moments.
Harsh winds wailed past
the entrance to the cave.
A blizzard was tearing
through the night beyond
our little shelter. I could
feel the bitterness of
the frozen world outside.
The dwindling fire a
meagre offering compared
to the unrelenting
nightmare of snow; little
protection against the
sharp, icy winds that
crept their way into our
abode.

By the time dawn broke,
I was huddled in the
deepest corner of the
cave, wrapped tightly in
the fur cloak I had
thought would keep me
warm in these unforgiving
mountains. My companion
lay dead, taken either by
his wounds or the ice
that encrusted his lips
and eyelashes. The fire
had died about the same

time he did. So long ago
that it no longer even
smouldered. The blizzard
had cleared, but snow
still fell. It almost never
stopped falling in the
mountains. In a stupor of
hunger and sleep
deprivation, I emerged
from the cave. The sun
had only just risen above
the towering mountain
peaks, but shone so
brightly between the gaps
of grey cloud that
swarmed overhead I was
nearly blinded. Its rays
streamed off every flake
of glossy white snow,
snow that coated
everything in sight; from
giant boulders jutting
from the canyon walls, to
the trees that lined the
deep valley sprawling away
over both of my
shoulders.

We'd found our hideaway
halfway up the side of
the valley the night
before. As night fell, a
lucky break in the
barrage of snow meant
the dark rocky archway
caught my eye, a striking
contrast against the
white world that
surrounded it. In a rush
of cries, blood and panic,
we'd scrambled inside.
There was no sign of
that now. No sign of the
frantic night before. The
snow made everything so
elegant; so calm; so clean.
I had no idea where I
was going now. I had no
idea what I was going to
do. The man that lay
dead inside the cave was
the smart one; my
problem solver. The man
that lay dead somewhere
in the snow before me
was my navigator; the
one who could tell me
where to go. I was just

the muscle. The farmhand
with a large sword and
the will to swing it.

And I was alone.

My father had always
warned me about coming
into the mountains. There
were two truths in life,
he used to say: That the
mountains were no place
for farm folk, and that
Uncle Ryle was a no good
swindler. I'd learnt as a
boy that my Uncle was
not a swindler, he was
just better at business.

But many years later, I
was finally learning my
father wasn't wrong
about everything. But I
had a purpose for being
here; we all had a
purpose. And we knew
there were risks.

There was nothing left
for me now. Nothing left
but to finish what we
started. I dug my boots
into the snow beneath
and trudged on. Where I
was travelling — east,
north, west, I had no idea
— but I knew what I
was looking for. I knew
what I was hunting.

Wraiths left behind a
sort of luminous mist
wherever they moved, like
the shimmering trail of a
slug. This was how we
knew what had
slaughtered the people of
the village. This is how I
knew what had killed my
father. Often the trails
meant it was easy to
avoid the wraiths, but I
wasn't looking to avoid
this one.